

THE SETTING

463 referred to as 'the Kapu' or agricultural castes. As this name sug-
564 gests, they derive the major part of their subsistence by tilling
the land, although individuals from any of these groups may
engage in trade and commerce or may take up urban occupa-
tions.

In the second group we can place the following: the Brahmin
(priests), the Komti (traders), the Kummari (potters) and the
Golla (shepherds). The five sections of the Panch Bramha group
of artisan castes, that is, the Wadla (carpenters), the Kammari
(blacksmiths), the Ausula (goldsmiths), the Kase (workers in
bell-metal) and the Kanchari (sculptors), also belong to this group
—although they claim separate identity and are rather exclusive.
The Sale (weavers), the Gaondha (toddy-tappers), the Sakali
(washermen) and the Mangali (barbers) also follow their tradi-
tional occupations; and although in the hierarchy of caste organ-
ization their place is a little inferior to the castes mentioned above,
they belong to the second group for the purpose of our classifica-
tion. The position of the once-tribal but now largely assimilated
Vaddar (stone-breakers) and the Erkala (hunters and basket-
makers) is slightly different, for although they are not untouch-
ables their position among the clean castes is the lowest.

564 There are only two untouchable or depressed castes in Shamir-
pet, the Mala and the Madiga. Of these two, the Malas consider
783 themselves superior to the Madigas, by whose touch they are
[64] polluted. However, it should be pointed out that the Indian con-
stitution has abolished untouchability. The untouchable castes
can draw water from the public wells and can without discrimina-
tion share the public utilities with the clean castes. Their children
now freely attend the common village school. But social conserva-
tism dies hard and legislation alone cannot overnight change the
deep-rooted complexes of thought and behaviour which are the
heritage of many generations of a caste-ridden social system.
582 Caste still retains its endogamous character, and traditional rules
prohibit inter-dining with persons of lower castes. Thus in these
two spheres at least the untouchable castes have still to confine
themselves to their narrow circles. While in the cities the clean
castes are no longer sensitive to the touch of a person belonging to
these castes, in the countryside an untouchable still cannot
approach too close to clean-caste people lest they be polluted by a
chance physical contact. Some progressive-minded untouchables

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resent this disability, but nevertheless they recognize the value of 564 realizing their own limitations and continue to conform to the 783 traditional norms of behaviour.

The people of Telangana and Andhra-desa belong to the great (197) family of Dravidian-speaking people who developed a great 144 civilization in the south and have materially contributed to the final make-up of Indian civilization as we know it to-day. Racially they represent a mixture of several elements. In physical types also the people of Shamirpet show great variation. Most of the Muslim inhabitants of Shamirpet are the descendants of local converts and do not therefore greatly differ in physical characteristics from the local Hindu inhabitants, but the few immigrants whose arrival dates from recent times present a marked contrast with their more delicate features and fairer skin colour.

In point of dress and ornament the Hindus and Muslims differ 291 widely. Muslim men and boys wear loose trousers of thin white cloth called *pyjama*, and a vest or a shirt. Out of doors they put on the more conventional long coat buttoned up to the neck known as *sherwani*. They invariably wear a red fez cap or a black cap made of sheepskin. Muslim girls wear a tight *pyjama* and a long, loose tunic which often touches the knees. Round the shoulders and thrown round the back they wear a thin white or coloured scarf known as *dupatta* or *odhni*. On festive occasions these clothes are very colourful. Married Muslim women usually wear a blouse or bodice, and a *sari*—a wide piece of cloth, some five or six yards long, which is tied round the waist to form a skirt that nearly touches the ankles. It is tied in such a way that one end of the cloth is taken over the chest to one shoulder and then passed behind the neck to the other shoulder. Married Muslim women are [562] obliged by the rules of their religion to observe *pardah*, i.e. veil themselves in the presence of all but their closest relations. Whenever they leave their houses they wear this veil known as *burkha*, a garment which falls from the crown of the head to the ground. The Hindu mode of dress is quite different, and varies greatly according to the financial status of the different families. Among the poorer classes, infants remain naked, but occasionally a few rags are tied round their waists; and in childhood they go about in these tattered rags. Boys wear a vest or shirt and a *dhoti*. Girls wear a skirt (*lahanga*) and a blouse. Among the poorer classes these clothes are almost always dirty, for within a few days of their

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association have brought them in close contact with each other and their cultures are in certain fields inter-related, the two communities retain their own socio-religious identities. The Muslims are in a minority in the population of the village; but they are a close-knit group in socio-religious matters. All Muslims belong to the Sunni division. Among them there are no great inequalities of wealth and possession, and consequently there is, within the Muslim community, no evidence of class distinction. In matters affecting their socio-religious life they act as a separate and self-sufficient group, rarely seeking the help, assistance or advice of their Hindu neighbours. One of the remarkable characteristics of the predominantly Hindu rural society of India is that non-Hindu communities have also been influenced by the caste-hierarchy of Hinduism. Even the non-Hindu groups have had to fit somehow into the rigid framework of the caste-dominated social system; and while they have always remained outside it, never having been regarded as Hindus, they have nevertheless acquired a quasi-caste status in accordance with their general social, economic and political position. As Hyderabad was formerly ruled by a Muslim, his co-religionists had a privileged position in the affairs of the State. Their social status in the rural areas has always been more or less equal to that of the agricultural castes; although from the point of view of religion the Hindus have always regarded them as inferior. Nevertheless, a clean-caste Hindu can sit down with a Muslim, and the less orthodox can even touch them without having to take a subsequent purificatory bath.

The Hindu social system, founded on the division of society into 'castes', presents a social framework of great complexity. The traditional *varna* system, modified in the course of the evolution of Indian social polity, divides Hindu society into five major groups. The first three of these, viz. Brahmins (priests and men of learning), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors) and Vaishyas (traders) are regarded as *dvija* or 'twice born'. According to Hindu ritual only they are allowed to undergo the *upanayana* ceremony which symbolizes their spiritual re-birth and entitles them to wear the sacred thread. The fourth group is composed of numerous occupational castes who are relatively clean and are not classed as untouchables. Finally, in the fifth major group we can place all the untouchable castes. This classification is accepted by the Hindus all over India. The relative positions of the different groups,

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779 above account represents a fairly typical description of hell which
 775 one often hears in the village community. Through conversation,
 772 folktale, myth and legend these ideas are implanted fairly
 early into the minds of the village children, who start life with a
 fear of sin. But by the time they reach the age of undertaking wild
 adventures these fears are diluted, and the gruesome accounts of
 hell no longer hold their spell of horror over them. As old age
 approaches, bitter memories of failures and frustrations accumu-
 late and the flesh does not have the energy to undertake fresh
 adventures; people slowly begin turning their attention to
 thoughts of life after death. As an illiterate informant pithily put
 it: 'While youth lasts, passions rule the actions of man. While
 property lasts, the glitter of gold makes a man blind. But in old
 age, man laments for what he did in his youth. With his dim vision,
 he can no longer see the maddening glitter of gold. Then his
 thoughts turn to religion.'

777 The concept of *dharma* is also important, as it covers all the
 778 phases of the human life-cycle and fixes several details of intra-
 and inter-group life. *Dharma* has often been translated by Western
 writers as 'religion', but this translation hardly conveys the origi-
 nal meaning. It will perhaps be more appropriate to describe it
 as 'the way of life' or 'that which is right'. Acceptance of caste
 traditions and the general rules of piety, observance of fasts and
 feasts, rigidly following the norms governing the *rites de passage*
 and undertaking pilgrimages to places of worship or for bathing
 in holy rivers, can generally be said to constitute the *dharma* of the
 people. Special worship and rituals may be performed to attain
 certain special ends. It is through *dharma* that one can look for-
 ward to shaping one's destiny. The concepts of *pap* (sin) and *punya*
 (merit); and of ritual pollution are fundamental to the wider con-
 cept of *dharma*. Certain things must not be done by any member
 of the community irrespective of his caste because they are sinful.
 Murder, extreme cruelty and violence, and incest can be placed
 under this category. There are certain other things which must
 not be done by certain castes, or by certain individuals in par-
 ticular conditions. Sexual relations or inter-dining with a person
 of lower caste will lead to impurity. A woman in menses or a
 family immediately after childbirth and death remains in a state
 of ritual impurity for a specified period. After certain bodily
 excretions such as those of faeces, urine or semen, a prescribed

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bath or wash is necessary to remove the impurity caused by the act. Non-observance of these rules will have a polluting effect; and according to the nature and degree of pollution purificatory rites will have to be undertaken. 783

Belief in ghosts and spirits is universal. They are feared and propitiated. Strange mystical power pervading certain objects is recognized, and fetishes and amulets are eagerly sought. Witchcraft is often suspected, and three or four people in the community are believed to possess magical powers. 771 [718] [254]

Clearly, Hinduism as it is practised in the village is not the Hinduism of the classical philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstract content of the latter. It is a religion of fasts, feasts and festivals, in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life. Worship and propitiation of gods and spirits follow the annual round of festivals and the ritual of the human life-cycle. Disease and difficulty may also necessitate invoking assistance from these sources.

In early childhood religious instruction through legendary tales and anecdotes exercises its influence on the developing mind of the child in whose thoughts and world of fancy these ideas linger on. Youth brings in its wake a more worldly and materialistic outlook towards life and its pleasures. Thoughts are turned to religion when the evening of life approaches, partly to postpone the final moment of departure as long as it could be, and partly to ensure the future lying beyond the point of death. Analysis of life-histories reveals that spiritualism cannot be said to be the keynote in the life of the community; far from it the religion appears to be a practical one. It strengthens and fortifies the individual and the group in situations where technical competence and practical intelligence are of no avail, and at the same time acts as a bond of cohesion for maintaining the structural unity of the society. 869 771

2. BELIEF: GODS AND DEITIES

The Muslims believe in one God, and follow the way of life laid down for them by their Prophet. They all belong to the Sunni division, and as such differ from the Shias and other splinter divisions of Islam in respect of the interpretation of their holy book as well as in several details of belief, ritual and ceremonial. Almost all the Muslims of Shamirpet have been converted to Islam from [779] 795 776 [797]

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178 advantages perceived, responsibilities recognized.¹ Extending this approach to technical and organizational changes in peasant communities, we can attribute some changes in the life-ways of the people to State compulsion and legal prescription. In some spheres, particularly in material culture and technology, utility, convenience, availability and price determine to a great extent the adoption of new elements and traits. The prestige factor too is significant, for any externally induced or internally inspired change in the system of status evaluation brings in its wake significant modifications in the organization and life-ways of society. Innovation, variety and change for its own sake can also account for substantial variation from established norms in social behaviour at a given point of time. In a small rural community such as Shamirpet, which is situated near a big and modern city and is in everyday contact with it, the prevailing climate of opinion in social, economic and political matters in the city is bound to influence its general outlook and ways, for apart from their practical value city-ways are gradually coming to be regarded as more 'respectable' and 'progressive'.

178 So far State compulsion has been instrumental in bringing about little social and cultural change in the village community. Compulsory vaccination as well as inoculation at the time of an epidemic appear to be the only significant measures enforced by the State which have been accepted in the everyday life of the community. Although untouchability has been abolished by law, in actual practice it only gives to the hitherto untouchables an equal share in public utilities, for considerations of pollution bar all effective interaction between the high and the low castes especially in the social spheres of inter-dining and inter-marriage. Symbolic as it is, this gesture of the State has nevertheless brought about a considerable modification in the inter-group attitudes between the clean and untouchable castes.

178 The factors of utility, convenience and availability have played a more important role in bringing several new elements into the life of the community. Although indigenous herbs and magico-religious practices are still continued in the treatment of diseases, the efficacy and utility of allopathic drugs and injections have greatly changed the attitude of the people towards modern medicine. I have pointed out earlier that they eagerly seek these

¹ Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization* (London, 1951), p. 85.